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DIRECTORATE FOR FOOD, AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES  
COMMITTEE FOR AGRICULTURE

Or. Eng.

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**OECD Scheme for the Application of International Standards for Fruit and Vegetables**

**SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 9TH MEETING OF HEADS OF NATIONAL  
INSPECTION SERVICES**

**Herzlia, Israel, 11 to 13 October 1999**

*This document is circulated to Members of the Scheme and to national Delegations for INFORMATION.*

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**SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 9<sup>TH</sup> MEETING OF HEADS OF NATIONAL  
INSPECTION SERVICES  
HERZLIA , ISRAEL , 11/10/99 – 13/10/99**

**1. Opening and welcome address by the host country**

The meeting was chaired by Mr Igal Schulman from Israel. The welcome address by the host country is available in Annex II.

**2. Adoption of the Agenda [AGR/CA/FVS/A(99)1]**

The Agenda was adopted.

**3. Presentation of participants**

Participants presented themselves.

**4. Work of the Scheme.**

The Secretariat presented briefly the recent and future work of the Scheme.

As regards future work by the Plenary Meeting of the Scheme, it was proposed to deal not only with external quality, but also with internal quality and to reflect on a definition of internal quality, on criteria and on methodology used to measure it. It was also proposed to deal with quality assurance systems.

The issue of dealing with food safety and genetically modified organisms (GMOs) was also raised. On food safety, it was reminded that the FAO/WHO already works in this field ; on GMOs, it was noted that GMOs are not very common in fruit and vegetables yet, but that it could be useful to monitor what is going on on this issue, keeping in mind that other OECD departments and the FAO/WHO already work in this field.

It was also concluded that the exchange of information between inspection services made possible by the Meetings of Heads of National Inspection Services was very useful and that the Scheme should develop work in this area.

After a proposal by the New Zealand delegation, the Meeting of the Heads of National Inspection Services proposed that the Plenary Meeting of the Scheme reflect on the following issues:

- Do we have true international/global grade standards for fruit and vegetables?
- Is it possible for Heads of National Inspection Services to be objective about the need, or not for international grade standards for fruit and vegetables?

- What is the collective view of our export industries on the need for international grade standards for fruit and vegetables?
- What are our individual government's position on the need, or not, for official intervention associated with grade standards for fruit and vegetables?
  - Need for official intervention, if so why?  
(advantages/disadvantages)
  - Is it the role of trade/industry through the commercial supply and demand process?  
(advantages/disadvantages)
- Have we reached a crossroads with grade standards for fruit and vegetables? Are our industries capable of managing their own future in terms of meeting their commercial requirements?

#### **5. Quality assurance systems [AGR/CA/FVS(99)8 ; AGR/CA/FVS(99)9]**

The New Zealand delegation presented the changes that occurred in the structure of the New Zealand Ministry of Agriculture between 1980 and 1999 and the reasons for these changes. Then it presented the operation of the quality assurance system for exported fruit and vegetables of New Zealand.

The Swiss delegation presented the Swiss Food Act which requires that quality assurance applies at all levels of the food chain and presented how the various levels of the chain operate to assure quality in the fresh fruit and vegetable sector.

#### **6. Assessment of exchange of information between national inspection services [AGR/CA/FVS(99)1]**

The German delegation presented statistics on rejections of imported fruit and vegetable by the German official control service. In 1998, Germany rejected lots from 34 non EU countries out of which 10 were OECD countries. Marking represented half of the reasons for rejection and among the other half, breakdown diseases which could have been detected at export stage was the main reason.

Thereafter, an assessment of the exchange of information on rejected lots between the official control services of OECD Scheme member countries on the basis of document [AGR/CA/FVS(96)1/REV3] was made. The common feeling among participants was that this exchange of information was operating well but that time was a crucial factor and that document [AGR/CA/FVS(96)1/REV3], once filled out by the importing country, had to be sent by fax or e-mail as soon as possible. In addition, it was proposed that the list of national control services of OECD Scheme member countries be available on internet at the following address: <http://www.olis.oecd.org/agr/fruitscheme.nsf>

#### **7. Use of computer technology and other electronic devices in quality control [AGR/CA/FVS(99)3 ; AGR/CA/FVS(99)5 ; AGR/CA/FVS(99)6]**

The Israel delegation presented non destructive methods for quality and safety tests. Ultrasonic techniques are used to determine maturity of fruit as there is a link between the coefficient of toning down of the waves and the firmness of the fruit. This technique has been experimented on avocados, mangoes, dates and apples. Near infra-red spectroscopy is used to determine fruit maturity and the best time for harvest as infra-red absorption is linked with fruit ingredients such as sugar content. This technique has been experimented on dates. The *Discovery* technology allowing rapid testing of bulk produce (pallets) for contaminants, pests or GMOs was presented. The technology is based on the excitation of the residues and

production of aerosols which are analysed afterwards. These three technologies are still under development.

The United Kingdom delegate presented the computer-aided recording system for inspections used by Horticultural Marketing Inspectors (HMI). All inspectors are equipped with laptop computers and printers which enable them to call up data on the inspected company, record all data related to the inspection and print non-conformity notices or inspection certificates. This system has been implemented in order to obtain a high level of efficiency and to be able to enforce EC regulations while reducing the budget. Technical details as well as cost information were given to the delegates.

The US delegate presented digital imaging and Adobe Photo Shop technologies and their use in USDA Fresh Products' Branch. Digital imaging allows in particular to enhance inspection services (certificates accompanied by images depicting defects), to promote the Branch's credibility, to improve relationship with shippers and to provide for immediate viewing of images by interested parties far away from the Branch's offices. The Adobe Photo Shop programme allows to facilitate the elaboration and to improve the quality of visual aids.

**8. The role of official inspection services vis-à-vis private inspection bodies [AGR/CA/FVS(99)2 ; AGR/CA/FVS(99)4 ; AGR/CA/FVS(99)10]**

The Dutch delegation presented the role of AQS (Quality Inspection Bureau for Fruit and Vegetables) which is an independent private inspection body charging its services to its customers (mainly producers and retailers). The creation of this body was found necessary in order to propose to consumers higher quality products and hence to achieve better sales.

The South African delegation presented the structure and the activities of the PPECB (Perishable Products Export Control Board), sole assignee of the South African Ministry of Agriculture for fruit and vegetable inspection, after the deregulation in 1997. Deregulation has led to more quality-consciousness, voluntary raising of standards, more market orientation and more accountability of service suppliers.

The New Zealand delegation provided an overview of the role of its government in quality control. Although there are accredited companies and independent verifiers, the government retains the overall control over fruit and vegetable quality and safety and is accountable for the whole process.

**9. Do official quality standards comply with trade requirements? [AGR/CA/FVS(99)7]**

In view of the growing importance of product liability for consumers and in order to ensure product safety and quality, the appropriateness was discussed of integrating all types of controls dealing with fruit and vegetables (especially both quality and phytosanitary) which, in certain countries, are at present done by several Ministries.

The issues of elaborating standards focussed on customer or consumer requirements and responding to growing demand for higher quality were also discussed.

The unanimous view was that it is difficult to answer the question of official quality standards complying with trade requirements because of its complexity.

**10. Other business**

The Chairperson of the Scheme thanked Israel for having hosted the 9<sup>th</sup> Meeting of Heads of National Inspection Services.

**ANNEXE I/ANNEX I**

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**ANNEX II**

**OPENING STATEMENTS BY MR ELDAD LANDSHUT, DIRECTOR,  
AND MR IGAL SCHULMAN, DEPUTY DIRECTOR,  
PLANT PROTECTION AND INSPECTION SERVICES (PPIS),  
MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

***WELCOME TO ISRAEL***

Dear Delegate,

I'd like to welcome you all to the 9<sup>th</sup> Meeting of Heads of National Inspection Services with the traditional Hebrew blessing "Shalom aleichem" ("May peace be with you").

For many of you this is the first visit to the Holy Land. I do hope that together with the official meeting and the field trip you'll find some time to enjoy the scenery, to bask on the beaches or if you wish, to follow in the footsteps of the Biblical ancestors.

One visit is not enough of course, to see the whole country thoroughly. Please remember that you are most welcome any time in the future.

The wine and refreshments in your room is for you to enjoy. This is a small present given by the Plant Protection and Inspection Services (P.P.I.S.). I am sure that during your stay we shall have more than one chance to use the word 'Le'chaim', (the Hebrew word for 'Cheers').

On behalf of P.P.I.S. and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, I wish you all a fruitful meeting and a pleasant stay in Israel.

Regards,

Eldad Landshut

Director, PPIS

**Welcoming address by Mr Igal Schulman**

Distinguished delegates, honorable guests, ladies and gentlemen:

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all today to the 9<sup>th</sup> Meeting of National Heads of Inspection Services here in Herzlia, Israel, under the auspices of the PPIS division of Israel's Ministry of Agriculture.

In our modern world the international trade of fresh fruit and vegetables is expanding rapidly, and with it, the awareness of the requirements of high quality produce and foodstuff safety. Therefore, it is of vital importance that heads of control services from exporting and importing countries alike meet together to discuss common issues which inevitably crop up in this ever-changing world.

This meeting will be the last one of the second millennium. Appropriately, it is taking place in the Land of the Bible, where ancient agriculture flourished. In particular, the land was blessed with the religiously symbolic seven biblical species of Olives, Grapes, Figs, Dates, Pomegranates, Wheat and Barley, many of which you'll see during the course of your stay.

The turn of the Millennium is, for many people, the appropriate time for self-examination and I think that we as a "Scheme" should do the same. The Scheme was established 37 years ago, setting objectives, which gave answers to the market needs of the 1960s and '70s. Obviously, the market is completely different now. Nowadays, large retail chains control the fruit and vegetable market, while the share of small green grocers has declined dramatically.

Accompanying this change was the profound expansion of international trade in fruits and vegetables. A wide selection of different species and exotic varieties from all over the world is now available throughout the year. Consumption habits have similarly undergone a major alteration. The average consumer has become more aware of the need for healthy food and balanced nutrition, as well as of environmental and ecological factors. As we all know, the safety of food has become a major issue. The consumer is now sensitive not only to chemical residues, bacterial contamination and micotoxins but also to irradiated food. The recent outcry over GM food has far from subsided, as people take a close look at the genetic make-up of what they are eating. Consequently, the authorities have had to follow suit by endorsing new laws and regulations and establishing enforcement bodies. The fruit and vegetables market is very much influenced by this trend.

Now, as we approach the third millennium many questions should be asked. Are the objectives of the Scheme still valid today? In other words, do the present quality standards contribute to facilitate fruit and vegetable trade as they clearly did in the past? Are the enforcing methods complying with market trends? During our meeting, these questions and other will be discussed, and I do hope that we shall be able to generate some answers. I have no doubt that the future of the Scheme very much depends upon those answers. I wish you all fruitful discussions and a pleasant stay in Israel.

### **ANNEX III**

#### **TECHNICAL VISITS**

1. PPIS (Plant Protection and Inspection Services) citrus inspection station in Ashdod harbour
2. "Carmel-kor" packing house, Agrexco sea terminal in Ashdod harbour
3. "Mor Hasharon" packing house for persimmons, mangos and litchis near Natanya
4. "Emek Hefer" citrus packing house, Natanya industrial area
5. "Grannot" avocado packing house near Hadera
6. "Tzemach" date packing house near the sea of Galilee.